

Iftar Dinner
Friday, September 18, 2009
18:20 (Food to be served at 18:49)
Restaurant “Vila Germia” Germia Park

Remarks

Good evening everybody.

Mufti Ternava, Members of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, Academics: Perhajr Ramazanin, Ramadan Kareem.

Thank you for joining us for this, the sixth Iftar dinner hosted by the American Embassy here in Kosovo.

Over the last year, the U.S. Embassy and the Kosovo Islamic Community have continued to collaborate on many meaningful projects. For example, for the sixth year in a row as well, an American English Language Fellow continues to teach English at the local Medresa. We are happy to sponsor this program which will help young Kosovars compete more effectively in the world’s global economy today.

In addition, last January ten members of the Islamic community had the opportunity to visit the United States through the State Department’s “Faith and Community Citizen Exchange.” The men and women of the Islamic community who participated in this program had the chance to meet with members of Muslim communities throughout the United States and witnessed first-hand the diversity of our society and the strength and resilience that derives from that diversity.

Mufti, this is a diversity that both our countries value. We, Americans, staunchly defend the freedom of religion in the first amendment of the American Constitution. And your Constitution guarantees that every person in Kosovo has the right to practice or not to practice his or her religion. This mutual respect is liberating to all members of society -- believers and non-believers alike. It allows our citizens to participate actively in debates and I believe that both of our societies benefit from the multiplicity of perspectives that comes from this.

In an Iftar dinner that he hosted earlier this month at the White House, President Obama noted that all religions share fundamental truths. He said, “Among those truths are the pursuit of peace and the dignity of all human beings. That must always form the basis upon which we find common ground. ... Together, we have a responsibility to foster engagement grounded in mutual interest and mutual respect.” And in the short time that I have been back in Kosovo this time, I have been deeply moved and impressed by the mutual respect and admiration between the people of Kosovo with whom I have met and the United States of America, between your leadership and the United States. And I think that the friendship, and if I can go so far to say, the love and the collaboration that exist between our two countries stands as an example to the world of the way our different religions and our different cultures can come together, can work together, and show mutual respect for each other.

All across America, Muslim families are coming together each night of Ramadan to celebrate their devotion to Islam. The many faiths and traditions to which Americans belong enrich our country and make it a more diverse place, and I believe a better place. The same holds true for Kosovo. The diverse mix of ethnicities, languages, backgrounds and faiths is one of Kosovo’s great strengths. We are thankful to Mufti Ternava and the Islamic community for their commitment to building a Kosovo in which all are welcome, all are safe, all are free to practice their faiths, and all can have confidence in a future of peace and prosperity together.

So, Mufti if I may, I would like to ask you if you would please bless this meal and those who have prepared it for us. Thank you again for all you have done, and Ramadan Kareem.